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Peace startling

There had been rumblings. Rumors. Troop movements. The lights had been burning late in chancelleries around the world. But when it finally happened, our nation was caught by surprise. Stunned. Unable to think or respond to this mind-boggling turn of events.

Yes, peace has broken out.

We had been warned, of course. Henry Kissinger had said in several background, off-the-record press briefings that the situation was getting completely out of control. Hanoi had been dropping several hints that things had gone far enough and that no power on earth could stay its hand.

Then, two weeks ago a weekly newspaper in Haiphong reported that long lines of North Vietnamese trucks, tanks and artillery were poised all along the DMZ ready to charge — northward.

The CIA fed this information to the State Department along with several other interesting items: Bugs planted on a neutralist diplomat in Hanoi picked up strange sounds during a meeting with top Communist officials. At first it was believed that a gun battle had broken out, but audio experts at the National Security Agency pinpointed the noise: popping champagne corks.

Jane Fonda sleeping late

Two days later, a contact in Peking reported a North Vietnamese diplomat emerged from a meeting with Chinese officials. Unmistakably, he was smiling. Finally, the clincher. CIA overflights of Beverly Hills showed proof positive that Jane Fonda was sleeping late.

"We tried to warn everyone," a top CIA official sighed. "We told State day after day. Even went directly to the White House, but they refused to believe us. All signs pointed to an immediate outbreak of peace. They were warned."

"That's a lie," a State Department undersecretary responded in an official denial. "Those spooks never told us it was coming so soon."

Later, State issued a 445-page White Paper outlining US-Vietnamese relations since 423 BC and concluded with a warning that, "We must be ever on the alert for signs of a collapsing underpinning of the overall policy while continuing to seek a lasting basis for ever and ever, Amen."

"What this means," a spokesman explained, "is that Kissinger hasn't told us what's going on."

"But didn't he meet with Secretary Rogers only yesterday?"

"Yes, but the Secretary doesn't speak German."

President addresses nation

Over at the Pentagon, the situation is chaotic. "We will fight in the fields; we will fight in the villages; we shall never surrender or give up," the Joint Chiefs said. "We call on all Americans to rally round the flag, for we must join together in a common crusade to keep America free and strong."

President Nixon immediately went to the American people in a nationwide TV address:

"My fellow Americans, I ask you not to lose faith in the American system just because of these minor and temporary setbacks. Let me make one thing perfectly clear, I never set foot in the Watergate. And in closing, may I leave you with this one thought — don't change horses in the middle of the stream. Nixon now, more than ever, Nixon now. Thank you and goodnight."

Sen. McGovern expressed relief that at least the period of doubt and waiting is over. He called again for a complete halt to the bombing of his campaign headquarters.

James Reston viewed it as a "surprise ranking somewhere between Pearl Harbor and Perle Mesta" while Eric Sevareid said it only shows once more that you can't trust a Republican administration.

On Wall Street, defense stocks tumbled. On Capitol Hill, the lobbyist from Boeing called it "a stab in the back of every decent freedom-loving American." The John Birch Society said in a statement that the unilateral declaration of peace is yet another example of the international Communist conspiracy.

The UN Security Council held an emergency meeting during which the Soviet and American ambassadors almost came to blows. "Once again the running dogs of the imperialist lackeys have sabotaged the will of the freedom-loving peoples of the world," the Soviet ambassador began.

Nearly in tears, the Soviet diplomat accused the Americans of ruining 10 years of carefully-constructed Soviet foreign policy in one fell swoop. "Don't you appreciate the effect this will have on the Warsaw Forces? Not to mention payment for all your wheat!" he stormed.

Bush volunteers Marines

Ambassador Bush acknowledged that the situation was, indeed, extremely grave. He urged that the Council rush a peace-keeping force to the greater Hanoi area in an effort to seal off "this potentially-explosive development." Bush volunteered the 82nd Airborne and the Second Marines.

As for the American man on the street, I took the news with typically American humor and grace. "I was afraid it would come this," sighed a World War II vet in Toledo. "These young people have been begging for it. Well, now at last they got their wish. The pigeons have come home to roost. They made their bed, now they can lie in it."

"We were forced into it," said a spokesman for Minutemen, Inc. "Those Commies backed us up to the wall and gave us no choice. They just got to learn that you don't pull Uncle Sam's beard and get away with it."

Perhaps the true spirit of our national reaction was voiced by Congressman Morgan Minfield, spokesman for the Capitol Hill hawk. "This move by Hanoi will undermine our national economy, put millions out of work, create chaos with our gold flow and our foreign policy. I have drafted the necessary legislation to answer such naked aggression — the Son of Tonkin Bay. No question about it — they've gone too far. This means war."